771 their deities, their ways of worship and their
177 festivals, shows clearly that it is a rather sober and primitive pagan religion with a thin surface of a few superficially adopted features of Christianity and Islam. It is most significant, that it is almost entirely devoid of the conception and the worship of God as a Supreme Being, and that only guardian spirits are invoked to grant protection, happiness and prosperity. It is moreover noteworthy that in this religion of tribes of Iranian origin, who have preserved a richly developed Iranian language partly archaic in character, there are to be found scarcely any distinct traits of an older form of Iranian religion. On the other hand, it can be stated that some of the characteristic conceptions of the Ossetic religion are similar to those of the religions of neighboring Caucasian tribes.

769 An essential part of any religious belief
775 is represented by the conception of death and the fate of the soul in the life to come. We have already mentioned that the soul of the deceased continues its existence as the guardian spirit of its former family. He takes care of the well-being of the family, and according to an old custom, the Ossets twice a year arrange a feast in the woods in honor of the spirit, which is accompanied by the offering of food and drink. They believe that at the time when a
● 761 person is sick, a tribunal of six men is formed in Heaven to decide whether this person should die. If the decision is in the affirmative, death

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appears in the shape of a wolf, and the sick person dies. As long as the body lies in the house, the soul hovers over it. But immediately after burial, it re-enters the body, which then rises up three times in the grave. Thereafter, the soul flies up to Heaven, and there is has to fly through seven circles, until it is received by the Barastyr, the lord of the realm of the dead, who sends it either to Paradise (dzänät) or to Hell (zyndon). In the world of the dead, souls again assume the shape of human beings, live and grow old like human beings. But when they reach old age, they are rejuvenated by eating the flesh of the dragon Ruimon who was born blind on the earth and frightens human beings by roaring and makes them die. It is Vatsilla, Saint Elijah, who saves them by letting down a chain, binding him and pulling him up, whereupon the spirits in Heaven hack pieces of flesh from his body and distribute them among the dead.

There is a judge functioning in the world of the dead, whose name issaid to be Aminon. At the bridge where its fate is decided, he asks the soul about the good and evil deeds it has done and shows the good soul the way to Paradise, whereas the evil soul is sent to Hell.

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It seems appropriate in this context to mention the Ossetic legends which describe and extol the wonderful deeds of the Narti, a tribe of mighty heroes, who fight innumerable